

**Canadian Literature—V.**

By ELEANOR ROBINSON.

**The Poems of Jean Blewett.\***

Jean Blewett has been called "the sweetest of Canada's poets." Such phrases as these are not always as easy either to justify or explain, as they are to pronounce; and this quite apart from the difficulty of entering upon comparisons. A study of Mrs. Blewett's poems disposes us to apply the adjective "sweet" rather to the nature which her verses reveal than to their lyric quality. We find singing power of a much higher degree in others among our Canadian poets. It would be unfair to compare her in this respect, for instance, with Lampman or with Carman. Nor is there among her lyrics any strain that sings as does Isabella Valancy Crawford's "Master Builder." But her verses, if not always of sustained sweetness and smoothness, are often very touching and impressive by the sincerity which rings in them—the sincerity of a sweet and loving woman, with a happy, wholesome view of life. Mrs. Blewett, though her parents were Scotch, and her husband an Englishman, is herself one of the "native-born," of whom she sings. Born at Scotia, on Lake Erie, she was educated at the collegiate institute at St. Thomas, Ontario, and began to write while very young, her first volume of poems, "Out of the Depths," appearing when she was but seventeen years old. She has written a good deal, in both prose and verse, for American magazines, and has become very favourably known in the United States. In a review of "Heart Songs" in the *Canadian Magazine* for December, 1897, Stanley Waterloo quotes the following comment on Jean Blewett by Eugene Field:

Once upon a time a great number of writers were sending out their thoughts to the world in prose and verse. Once in a while among their high notes and their low notes, good prose and bad prose, there would be found something so fresh and fair and subtle that everyone paid attention to it, and by and by began to watch for it, and to question, "Who is the maker of it?" "She is old," said one, "only years could teach her the sweetness and fullness and sadness of life." "She is grave," said another, "she strikes the minor key in a practised hand." "She is a strange, happy creature," said yet another, "the birds sing

aloud and all the world laughs in some of her songs." But the wise man said, "She is a nun, for she could not tell of heaven as she does had she not climbed to its heights by holy living."

Then one day, she, Jean Blewett, came among them in the body, and lo! she was just a girl, sweet faced, clear voiced, holding unconsciously the God-given dower, a poet's soul.

This gives some idea of the variety of strains in Mrs. Blewett's poems, and it must not be supposed, from what we have said of her happy outlook, that she shuts her eyes to the wrongs and pain of life. There is a sternness and hot indignation in such poems as "Slander," "Envy" and "The Trust" far removed from any blind and weak optimism. This world seems to the writer to be neither a place where we may rest in satisfaction, nor one where our only hope lies in escape to a better, but one of mingled joy and grief, right and wrong, which it is our work to make happier and better. We find the expression of this in the following poem on "Life's Grandest Things:"

What is the grandest work of all?

The work that comes every day:  
The work that waits us on every hand  
Is work that, for us, is truly grand,  
And the love of work is our pay.

What is the highest life of all?

It is living, day by day,  
True to ourselves and true to the right,  
Living the truth from dawn till the night,  
And the love of truth for our pay.

What is the grandest thing of all?

Is it winning heaven some day?  
No, and a thousand times say No;  
'Tis making this old world thrill and glow  
With the sun of love, till each shall know  
Something of heaven here below,  
And God's *well done* for our pay.

And again in "Discontent," which seems to us to exhibit her finest qualities:

My soul spoke low to Discontent:  
Long hast thou lodged with me,  
Now, ere the strength of me is spent,  
I would be quit of thee.

Thy presence means revolt, unrest,  
Means labour, longing, pain;  
Go, leave me, thou unwelcome guest,  
Nor trouble me again.

I longed for peace—for peace I cried;  
You would not let her in;  
No room was there for aught beside  
The turmoil and the din.

\* HEART SONGS. By Jean Blewett. Second Edition. Toronto: George N. Morang, 1898.

THE CORNFLOWER AND OTHER POEMS. By Jean Blewett. Toronto: William Briggs, 1906.